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# **Diasporic Youth Identities of Uncertainty and Hope: Second Generation Albanian Experiences of Transnational Mobility in an Era of Economic Crisis in Greece**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores various dimensions of ‘gender’ and ‘mobility’ among immigrant youth from a transnational perspective in an era of economic crisis. The extent and parameters of continuity, contestation and change in migrant youth identities are analysed and we suggest that neither gender nor identity are stable categories but are embedded in socio-cultural particularities both in the country of residence (Greece) but also in the country of origin (Albania). Through in-depth interviews with 52 participants, all second-generation Albanian immigrants in Greece born to two Albanian parents, the paper addresses youth identification in relation to gendered representations of belonging. The narrative accounts that we have selected and analysed reflect the emotional challenges, constraints and creativity of Albanian youth.

**Keywords:** Albania, Greece, mobility, youth identities, gender, economic crisis

## **Setting the Scene: Situating Actors and Issues**

In recent years the broad theme of *gender* and *mobility* has proved to be of vital interest to an emergent interdisciplinary migration studies scholarship (King & Vullnetari 2009, Baldassar & Gabaccia 2011, Christou & King 2011, Vaiou 2012, Oso & Ribas 2013). This paper explores various dimensions of this topic from an ethnographic perspective. In the challenges shaping migrant lives and identities in a globalised world, traditional masculinities and femininities are being contested, defended and re-imagined in a variety of socio-cultural contexts. Here we address the contestations encountered by migrant youths alongside the trajectories of new

expressions of mobilities in a transnational perspective and further enhances (migrant) youth studies more broadly. We demonstrate through our empirical evidence that neither gender nor identity are stable categories but are embedded in cultural, historical, social, and political structures, irrespective of how fluid those structures are proving to be in contemporary times.

The paper exemplifies how Albanian youth, as second generation migrants in Greece, act as *agents* of change and continuity by living transnational gendered lives in an era of economic crisis. More specifically it examines the following core question:

How are gendered migrant youth identities and future aspirations shaped by family transnational relationships and experiences in the context of the on-going economic crisis? Additionally, the subthemes that emerge in the analysis illuminate issues of: traditional/hegemonic visions of gender; ethnonational signifiers defining and shaping identities; emotionalities and every day life experiences of 'home' and belonging.

The above core question and subthemes provide the wider context of the research and although the paper does not claim to exhaust in great detail all these issues, nevertheless it provides an overview of the central themes through an ethnographic and narrative account, namely that of migrant youth identification in relation to gendered representations of belonging. Hence, the paper offers a narrative account of emotional, cultural and gendered representations of migrant youth lives in their country of migrant family settlement (Greece) as well as the ancestral homeland/country of birth (Albania). In this direction it is salient to maintain a comparative lens on how these two countries with obvious socio-cultural, historical and political contexts have impacted on how second generation gendered youth identities are negotiated and articulated.

While age and life stages are important signifiers of the temporality that shapes ‘youthness’, we also consider gendered experiences as significant forces in how youth is narrated. In line with our theorisation that follows, we are also considerate of emotionalities and subjectivities of youth identifications. In incorporating all these parameters, we have made a methodological decision to limit the analysis of ‘youth’ to the age of 30 in bridging the intermediary links of childhood experiences with the transitional spaces of negotiating adulthood in making conscious life decisions in relation to migration and transnational livelihoods. Moreover, often, conversations with participants focused on memories from childhood ‘homecoming visits’ to the ancestral homeland and form a central force of redefining their sense of self. Hence, the notion of life stage appears to be important in the analysis as temporal self-definitions are fluid and contextual to immigrant life experiences.

The data on which this paper is based derived during ethnographic research of a larger project that took place during the late summer/early autumn of 2012 and throughout 2013. We conducted in-depth interviews with 52 participants (35 women and 17 men) from 19 to 30 years of age, all second-generation Albanian immigrants in Greece born to two Albanian parents. Fifteen of the respondents were born in Albania, mostly central and southern Albania (Tirana, Korçë, Bilisht, Elbasan, Berat), and one was born in Greece (Athens). From those who were born in Albania, the vast majority (35) came to Greece before the age of twelve. The respondents were contacted through personal acquaintances of the researchers and the interviews were conducted in fourteen different cities of Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki, Veroia, Kastoria, Argos Orestiko, Florina, Edessa, Irakleio-Crete, Volos, Ioannina, Kozani, Grevena, Corfu, Lamia). All our participants are currently following studies in Greek Higher Education Institutions. The narrative guide included such themes as: ‘family background’, ‘migration history and experience’, ‘ethnic

identity and transnational ties', 'intergenerational transmission', 'legalisation and naturalisation', 'school experiences', 'university experiences and perspectives', 'socialisation and integration', 'gender identities', 'future plans and return'. The interviews were conducted in Greek, audio recorded and then transcribed and translated during the data analysis stage process. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

### **Albanian Immigrants in Greece: Some Background Notes**

Albanian immigration to Greece started in the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of the 45-year communist regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania, during which the country had been the most isolated in Europe, possibly in the world. Rates of emigration during these early years of mass exodus were particularly high among the ethnic-Greek Albanians of the southern part of the country. In 1993-1996, there was a temporary decrease in the migratory movement from Albania to Greece; in 1996-1997, however, the political instability, social unrest and economic crisis in Albania sparked another phase of mass emigration (Korovilas 1999; Vullnetari 2007; Maroukis and Gemi 2010). Although during the 90s for most Albanian people migration to Greece was seen as a strategy for acquiring short-term financial capital or as the 'key' to enter the 'door' of Italy (Hatziprokopiou 2003), during the last decade, Albanian migration in Greece has taken the form of permanent family settlement (Michail 2009; 2010b).

Greece has received the majority of the Albanian emigrants due mainly to its proximity with Albania and its lack of an organised migration policy. In March 2010 there were 368,269 Albanian permit holders (146,050 females and 222,219 males) registered in the residence permit database, nevertheless the total number of the Albanian immigrants is estimated to have exceeded 600,000 including the undocumented ones as well as the irregular seasonal immigrants who work in agriculture, construction or tourism (Maroukis & Gemi 2010). It would also be

worth noting that the Albanian irregular resident population has decreased substantially over the last decade due to regularisation and lately due to the visa-free entrance regime and a return trend to Albania related to the ongoing Greek economic, social and political crisis (Maroukis 2012; Michail 2013). In general Greek governments have been reluctant to accept immigration as a long-term feature of the modern Greek society basically due to the “ethno-cultural definition of Greek nationality and citizenship” (Triandafyllidou & Veikou 2002, 191).

Albanian immigration to Greece has been transnational in character mainly because of the proximity of the host to the home country. Immigrants maintain their ties to their home country in various ways, for instance: paying regular visits, establishing transnational businesses, building houses, sending remittances (Michail 2013), making “home and host society a single arena of social action” (Margolis 1995, 29). Kearney proposes that “transnational communities commonly refer to migrant communities spanning two nations” (1995, 559). Brettell suggests that transnationalism in anthropology reflects a more general move “away from bounded units of analysis and localized community studies” (2008, 121).

The present study is set in a transnational framework where geographic and cultural borders are being transgressed by the immigrants in the process of migration. Transnationalism entails a series of practical and emotional compromises and changes in lives and identities. These changes are profound, yet subject to continual negotiation, both within the ‘self’ and amongst family members. The family dimension opens up a context for considering expressions of transnationalism, identity and belonging which are likely to differ by gender and across subjectivities. As clearly illustrated in our core question and subthemes noted earlier, in this paper we explore the impact of transnational pathways on the evolution and reconstruction of home, belonging and identity in second-generation immigrant youth.

## **The Greek Economic and Social Crises**

The Greek crisis that followed the global economic recession in 2008 became more visible in late 2009 and was connected not only to structural weaknesses, which means the defects of the Greek state, economy and society, but also to Greece's joining 'a flawed monetary union'. Three Greek governments from 2010 to 2014 adopted three bail-out programmes accompanied by harsh austerity measures to reduce state exposure to debt and, implemented, structural adjustments to improve competitiveness, according to the policies dictated by the 'Troika' (the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank). All of the above have failed and exacerbated the crisis across Europe (Michail 2013).

The damage that austerity has brought to Greece has been severe and pushed the country to the brink of economic and social collapse. Austerity has led to public expenditure, higher taxes and salary cuts thus reducing market demand. The result has been rising unemployment, falling consumption and declining investment. About one-third of the Greek population nowadays lives below the poverty line. While the numbers of homeless people are mounting daily, soup-kitchens queues are lengthening and the welfare state is on a daily basis reducing a number of provisions.

According to EUROSTAT within six years unemployment has risen to 27.5%<sup>1</sup> among the general population and 58.3%<sup>2</sup> among young people. Both these rates are the highest in Europe. According to the World Bank, the Greek GDP per capita dropped from 30,536 US\$ in 2008 to 21,910 US\$ in 2013, a reduction of about 28%<sup>3</sup>. The crisis has particularly hit the main sector where immigrants have been employed: construction. The real estate market is in deep crisis and public works have almost ceased to be carried out. The majority of the immigrants who lost their jobs have been facing the risk of losing their legal stay status since they are not able to renew

their residence permits (Triandafyllidou 2012; Michail 2013). Due to the crisis, Greek employers are unable to insure and declare their employees and most immigrants are facing the possibility of being forced to leave the country as soon as their existing permits expire. The alternative is to remain in the country in a status of illegality.

So far those immigrants who return are mostly Albanians who have planned their return after many years of emigration, or those who have lost their jobs and legal status. “This time first-generation and elderly people seem more likely to return to and regroup in Albania, whilst, young people, the second generation, want to either stay in Greece or re-migrate to another country. The migration cycle that opened for so many Albanian families over two decades ago is continued with its agents having to take decisions as important for their households as their initial one to emigrate to Greece” Michail 2013, 276).

We focus on second-generation immigrant youth, who insist on either remaining in Greece (despite the crisis) or moving to other destinations, and through their narratives we seek to *narrate* youth identities within particular social and cultural agendas of transnational lives. In our ethnography, as a liminal category, *immigrant youth* not only marks the transition from childhood to adulthood but above all the experiences of migrancy and mobility.

### **Theorising Immigrant-Youth Mobile and Gendered Identities in Space and Time**

Following Anthias’ (2012, 11) fourfold scheme of categories (organizational - representational - intersubjective - experiential) in understanding the complex ethnic group formation, we agree that a dialogical formulation in concrete practices within space and time of different types of social relations (such as gender and class) is needed.



It is the latter two categories, those of intersubjective (practices) and experiential (narratives) that we focus on in this paper and which figure prominently in our analysis. The first (intersubjective) focuses on practices in relation to others, including non- person actors such as the police, the social security system and so on. It also denotes patterns of practices of identity and otherness (such as practices of bonding, friendship and distancing). The second (experiential) focuses on narratives relating to meaning making and sociality (including the affective, the emotional and the body). This includes narrations of identification, distinction and othering. However, some of these themes also overlap with the organisational (structural position) and representational (discourses), especially when it comes to the family and society relations.

We endeavour to present gendered aspects of the emotionalised trajectory of second generation immigrant youth who still struggle with finding identification and belonging which can embrace attachment to both ‘host’ and ‘home’ country. This ‘disrupted’ emotionalised experience of be/longing is illustrated by the fragments of memory, place, time and experience of mobility of the participants, that is, their narratives of temporal and spatial encounters. Our participants are active actors, global social subjects and subjective participants who can take decisions, implement them and make a difference in combating stereotypes and improving the quality of their lives. Vaiou (2012, 249) acknowledges that the study of the post-1989 migratory movements offers “a prime site for reflection on the gendered meaning/s and content of mobilities and borders”, and in her article on an Albanian woman from Elbasan to Athens, among other themes, she gives an account of “gender inequalities in choice and cases of immobility and/or enclosure, emphasis on agency and the importance of space and place”. We, too, focus on the spatial dynamics of such gendered representations and the process of

empowerment. We accept 'empowerment' to be a complex concept deeply intertwined with economic and political power structures and embedded within particularities of social and cultural contexts.

From a feminist perspective, Riger (1994) considers empowerment problematic because it implies the transmission of power to an individual or group that 'lacks' power. If this power is externally transmitted, that assumes power is being transmitted from a more powerful individual with control over the quantity and timing of the transmission; therefore, the process of empowerment relies on the very power structure it is trying to subvert. If the power is internally drawn in, that assumes a marginalised individual has the information, resources, and skills to gain power; however, the process of marginalisation often denies access to these tools of empowerment. Therefore, Riger criticises a preference for masculine concepts of mastery, power, and control over traditionally feminine concerns of communion and cooperation. She challenges us to redefine power, and advocates the conceptualisation of empowerment in a more collective and less individualistic sense.

Yet, because empowerment is a multilevel process that can occur within individual, organisational, and community contexts, understanding the processes at these various levels as well as the interactions between levels can unveil some of these in shaping youth identities. In this paper we demonstrate how youth agency is shaped by external and internal forces that are multidimensional as they extend from the microspaces of the family migration history, upbringing and ethno-national aspects of migrant life to the macrospace of transnationalism. Hence, we also evidence in the degree of self-awareness that exists in immigrant youth and how they harness this in order to act individually and make conscious life decisions.

This paper also presents rich narrative data and analyses gender relations. We see femininities and masculinities not as single entities but as expressions of negotiated acts lodged in the *structure* of relationships among *actors*; i.e. the role of social structures in creating or maintaining inequality, exclusion, and hierarchy. We interrogate the boundaries of gender relationships as fluid yet dynamic and lodged into the life narrative but also as a mediating force shaping the life narrative. We view migrant youth as agents of change and resistance. We examine migrant groups as collectivities of agency in order to understand gendered identities.

Women in migrant life are often regarded as the guardians and custodians of socio-cultural ties and traditions. Women migrants have been conventionally understood to be embedded in the cultural private world of the ‘home’ rather than the political public social world. Here we focus also on a third space which is emerging in the data which is around the psychic selfhood which is potentially agentic in new ways. It is against this conflating notion of gendered roles that we question the following: What types of gender relationships potentially become sources of agency for migrant youth and what may limit them?

In the following sections we will discuss the central themes and subthemes mentioned above through participant narrative excerpts.

***Building Upon Identification and Belonging*** It is how you think and in what language you think. We think in Greek. I don’t dream in Albanian. I dream in Greek. And, it goes without saying that I curse in Greek! (Daphne 20 years old)

My body is Albanian but my mind and thinking is Greek...I consider myself as ‘Greek’...I belong here to Greece, I grew up here and my parents always talked to me about Greece not Albania. (Umberto 20 years old)

Our participants elaborated on how they identified with all things Greek in terms of their lifestyles and habits. They identified both their mentality and behaviour as being ‘Greek’ and while all of them predominately had Greek friends, a great majority of those, more than half, were also in personal, intimate relationships with Greek women and men. A female informant explains why she would never choose an Albanian partner in the following excerpt:

No matter how many years have passed and how much one has got used to the customs and ideas of the host country, there are still some things one can never get rid of. I disagree with my own father on the way they [Albanian men] approach the issue of women, the way they build-up a family, the way that you [meaning a woman] must respect your husband but one doesn’t have to respect you [meaning his wife] and all these that leave Albania behind. I believe that if I chose an Albanian husband he would carry all these ideas, also his mother and father would affect him on certain decisions and this is something I don’t like. I’m used to behaving otherwise. (Eliza 25 years old)

At the same time, the personal immersion into living Greek lives was not stripped from any degree of agency and reflection or the reality of their ancestral origins. As Artan explains:

I could also live in Albania. I am not one of those second generationers who have become hostile towards their country [Albania]. I know at what stage Albania is because my father has the Albanian channel on the TV twenty-four hours a day and so I don’t get into that mindset where I compare Greece to Albania. I have distinguished them and I know what Greece is and what Albania is. I am not going to forget my roots, but Greece is my base and my second homeland. (Artan 23 years old)

I am among the lucky ones because I am between two cultures, two mentalities: the Greek and the Albanian, and I'm able as a Greek-Albanian man to compare things. That's why I'm lucky! And also because I know one more language. (Umberto 20 years old)

But the hold of roots on their sense of self is not to be underestimated: *'Above all I am Albanian'* Daphne tells us, *'That is the country I was born and raised until the age of seven'*. Yet there seems to be an ongoing emotional struggle in terms of belonging and where 'home' is: *'Practically, I belong here....Emotionally, I belong here and there. I don't cancel my roots because I see something better'*.

Participants appear to be reflectively aware of their origins and trajectories. For the most part they seem to be living their lives as university students; yet, conscious of the wider socio-economic circumstances that may hinder their professional aspirations and the current volatile climate of enhanced xenophobia with the rise of far right extremist groups in Greece. However, some among them have experienced xenophobia and racism at a very young age, and hence a lot earlier than the current anti-immigration social sentiment that grew during the last years of the economic crisis. They reported experiences of discrimination and racism in their schools; both by teachers/administrators and their (Greek) classmates. Some of their experiences narrated seem to take place along similar parameters of direct hostility, exclusion, and stigmatisation:

I feel a sense of injustice and this I remember to this day. It was the School Principal when I was in secondary school and she had an explicit racist stance and behaviour toward me and other kids of the same ethnic group and origin as me (Albanian). (Paul 26 years old)

Well, in primary school I didn't really have very good relations with some of my classmates due to my ethnic origin because they would make fun of me and when I was seventeen years old in

the second year of Lyceum I had a problem with one of my professors because of my ethnicity.  
(Hannah 19 years old)

Some of my teachers didn't like me because my parents came from another country. For example they called me 'foreigner' and we had instances of racism. (Eric 22 years old)

Participants elaborated on such unpleasant and traumatic experiences that had an impact on their daily school and social lives. For instance, Kyriakos, a 21 year old student told us of the combination of indifference, hostility and unprofessionalism that he repeatedly experienced at the university school administration office when he required a letter certifying that he was a registered full-time student, in order for his father to process the paperwork for the renewal of their residence permit. In several pages of transcripts we have an elaborated account of the hurdles and obstacles and essentially the systemic and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1984) that Kyriakos and others experience in everyday life.

Yet, Kyriakos, while acknowledging issues of power and constraint in his life, also underscores the value of his social networks within Greek society that have enabled him to supersede some of these constraints. Kyriakos talks endlessly about his Godfather who is a 'famous University Professor' and his Godfather's brother who is also a 'renowned neurosurgeon'. He indulges in talking about his access to 'privilege' in the domains of his Godfather's social networks and the opportunities that this access to the 'ruling class' offers him and his family. So in reality the social domination that Kyriakos and his family may have experienced within everyday occurrences of symbolic violence and power are in a sense counter-acted upon their access to a social matrix of a new positionality where they, as Albanians living in Greece, accept their position in the exchange of social value that occurs between them and those who include them as 'part of their families' (Collins 1998).

Albanians usually choose Godparents among the Greeks and in this way they try to develop bonds with the Greek community and transform the impersonal relationships into institutionalised personal ones. The parents rely on the Godparents for their children's educational and career development but they also consult them on several other issues when needed. Thus, on the one hand, they feel more secure enjoying the support of a prominent/wealthy member of the Greek society and raise their prestige within their own community, and on the other, they manage to achieve more successful integration within the Greek society (Michail 2010a). Greeks who are asked by Albanians to become Godparents for their children usually see it as an honourable proposal which cannot be easily turned down. Ever since a Godparenthood is established, the Godparents are involved into an ethical responsibility of maintaining a close spiritual relation of guidance to that of the parents'. Thus, ethical/spiritual ties are enacted upon as avenues of incorporation and belonging. This is an agentic outlet of both building close-knit relations with the majority population and a way to provide migrant youth with resources and opportunities through such relations.

### ***Youth Mobilities in an Era of Economic Crisis***

In the early 1990s, many Albanians took the decision to migrate to Greece looking for a better life. Nowadays, a new mobility cycle seems to have opened for most among those Albanian immigrant families that until recently seemed well settled in Greece. Following research conducted among first and second generation Albanian immigrants during the peak period of the economic crisis in Greece (2010-2011), Michail points out that the economic crisis has led first-generation Albanian immigrants to consider the possibility to return to Albania. Those who return leave their adult children behind since the second-generation migrants seem unwilling to

follow their parents to their ancestral land (Michail 2013). For this generation the economic crisis and the difficulties in acquiring Greek citizenship<sup>4</sup> become strong push factors for re-migration either to another European country or overseas.

The present study looks closer at the second-generation Albanian immigrants' consideration for re-migration as the only option under the present circumstances and sheds light into their preferences of future mobility:

For me going back [to Albania] would be one step backward not ahead. My parents don't even want to hear about this. One leaves Albania for Greece because the environment is much better. Then one has to leave Greece for a better environment. We must progress and develop, look for better and challenging conditions. We live at times that nothing is impossible... (Roger 25 years old)

I believe, by the time I will have finished my studies, the economic crisis will have passed. Then, I would like to open my own consulting room and live here in Thessaloniki. (Migel 21 years old)

If I ever had to leave Greece, I would go to a better place like the UK or Belgium, where I have relatives and friends who have lived there for many years and could help me to make a new start. But again I wouldn't like to leave...only if I had to... (Eric 22 years old)

From our 52 participants only 3 have reported that they might consider the possibility of going back to Albania and only if the crisis continued and they had no chances in finding any job in Greece. Also, one of the participants believes that there are better work prospects in Albania, than in Greece. The remaining 48 participants have stated clearly that they prefer either to stay in Greece, hoping that things will improve in the future, or migrate to another European country and even further to the US or Australia. They emphasise that they will not leave Greece unless



the economic crisis continues: *'If I leave from Greece, it would be for a better place'*. In general they feel that going to Albania is a step backward to what their parents left some years ago looking for better life opportunities. They believe that going back is like cancelling their parents' initial decision as well as all the efforts they have put into such an endeavour. Besides Albania does not constitute an attractive destination for second generation youth who seem to renegotiate their sense of belongingness:

My parents, there is no way that they would like me to go back to Albania. No matter how much patriots they might be, they wouldn't like this. They would prefer me to go abroad to another country because they are not happy with Greece either. (Umberto 20 years old)

My parents would like something else for me [than going back to Albania]. They wouldn't choose Albania because they know there is much poverty there and that's the reason why they emigrated in the first place: to pursue a better life. They would prefer me to find a job here in Greece and live close to them. They don't want for themselves to live the way their parents have lived; all alone in Albania without seeing their children almost at all. (Mimoza 21 years old)

I feel that I belong here in Greece. I want to be with my beloved people. If I go to live in another country, I'll become an alien for a third time. (Daniela 22 years old)

As all of the participants have been visiting Albania regularly together with their parents since their childhood, comparing quality of life, prospects and politics between Greece and Albania, is inevitable. Such comparative insights also reinforce decision-making: My life would be much inferior [in Albania] than here and my salary much lower. I would go there only for holidays, but not to live permanently. (Daniela 22 years old)

Prospects are bad in Greece because of the crisis, but in Albania corruption is worse than here. I believe also there is no development there. (Geraldo 20 years old)

I wouldn't go to Albania [...] the corruption there is unbelievable and the whole country turns around it. One can graduate from a University by bribing the professors without having ever gone

to the University at all. From what I have heard from my cousins who study there, the system is lousy; very lousy. (Roger 25 years old)

The recent economic crisis and the deterioration of employment prospects in Greece stimulate the possibilities of future migration for the second generation. However, given the persistent conditions of underdevelopment in the country of ancestral origin, clearly erases Albania from the map of destination countries of future mobility. The socio-economic profile that Albanian youth aspire to is one of upward mobility in both attaining post-graduate education and highly skilled professional employment. This is a trend similar to most second-generation profiles of such upward mobility, however, in this case on a psychosocial level we detect that Albanian youth perceive return migration to the ancestral homeland as a step backward. It equals for them a catastrophic pathway that would cancel their parents' aspirations, hard work and conscious decision to become the primary migration group. This is revealingly in sheer contradiction to second-generation return migration research in Greece<sup>1</sup> that highlights the counter-intuitive pathway of, for instance, Greek-Americans, Greek-Germans and Greek-Danes who abandon comfortable lives in order to relocate to the ancestral homeland through a highly emotionalised 'myth/dream of return' to their roots in search of ontological meaning and belonging (Christou 2009, 2011; Christou and King 2014). On the contrary, second generation Albanians appear to be resilient to any pull forces emanating from ancestral heritage bonds of rootedness and belonging as they act in a more calculating self-preservation mode of survival than an emotionalised pursuit of ethnic membership.

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<sup>1</sup> For an insightful discussion on development, the economic crisis and the role of the diaspora in contributing to Greece at present, refer to Mavroudi, 2015 for recent research in Australia on the Greek-Australian case. For explorations of the Greek-Danish as well as Greek-American and Greek-German case refer to Christou 2011 and Christou and King, 2014 respectively.

It is this sense of resilience and autonomy that we discuss in the section that follows which is particularly important in a gendered exploration of agency. We offer an in-depth exploration of how challenging patriarchy becomes a vehicle of empowerment.

### ***Challenging Patriarchy: Perpetuating Power Constellations***

Hierarchies of power, domination and control in migrant family settings is often perceived as a perpetual battlespace of cultural diffusion whereupon the ‘host’ country is often blamed for providing bad examples of women’s liberated sexualisation, choice and assertion of autonomy, be that in the public or private domain, when migrant women revolt against patriarchal behaviour (Christou 2011). Both male and female participants elaborated on their personal views and family experiences of how cultural codes and norms in the Albanian context are synonymous with backwardness and patriarchal principles that were to be avoided and overcome by pursuing educational and professional aspirations that would enable women to slightly close the gap of inequality.

Well, simply that since I was very young my main goal was to be educated because most Albanian women and especially those who remain in Albania don’t really want to go to school, they just wish to marry. Since I was really young I never wanted that (to marry) but all I wanted was to become independent. That was my goal. I only want to live in Greece because I can do a lot more things here because I have a lot more freedom which is not the same in Albania as girls there don’t have any freedom. (Hannah 19 years old)

If I could possibly change something in the lives of women in Albania, it would be to give them a little bit of fun and happiness in their lives there. The lives of women there (in Albania) are very difficult and not interesting at all from what I can see. They don’t have a lot of interesting things to do and they usually don’t work unless it is in the farms. What kind of life is that?! The ones

who have lived here (in Greece) don't want to return even if they work hard. Because they have more freedom. They earn their own money. They are empowered! (Paul 26 years old)

I believe that in Albania a woman is not equal [with a man] she cannot decide on what to do and is not free. I don't like not being able to make my own choices and be restricted by others. That's why I prefer living in Greece. (Gabriela 21 years old)

Women are very oppressed in Albania. Whatever they do is criticised by others, and usually negatively. Here (in Greece), they have more freedom. That's why I don't like living in Albania. (Sonia 21 years old)

If I were in Albania my life wouldn't be like it is now. Not so much in relation to material goods but in terms of psychology. I would be very oppressed. I would be obliged to stay at home all the time, and only go out once every now and then. Generally the others would decide for me and as a woman I would not have the right of my own will. On the contrary now things are very much different. (Christina 25 years old)

In both female and male narratives there is a consensus about the lack of freedom, independence and opportunity for women in Albania, in contrast to the abundance of autonomy, choice and prospects for women of Albanian origin living in Greece.

Women have jobs. Men don't work but women work. It is this thing that men sit around (he implies that they are jobless) that I don't think is right. But it is better than nothing. Women are going up the ladder of hierarchy, things are changing. Of course the man still is the pillar of the house. (Kyriakos 21 years old)

The traditional Albanian family is suggested as having its roots in the 'Balkan patriarchy' and the 'Balkan family pattern' embedded in a social structure system where patrilineality, patrilocality, male moral authority and the formal subordination of women within the household

have been the spinal core of this structure (Kaser 2012, 35-36). Similarly to what Peristiany (1965) has observed in the frame of reference for the ethnography of the Mediterranean and Loizos & Papataxiarchis (1991) for Greece, kinship and familism in Albania have also been the most important orientations in life, as they inform “values and all actions oriented to prestige”, are reproduced through marriage and define the limits of both maleness and femaleness. As King *et al.* suggest: “Both gender and age play a critical defining role in shaping social positions within the family and society, resulting in the supremacy of men and the subordination of women within the context of a ‘protective’ family” (2011, 401). Several scholars have suggested that many patriarchal traits still remain in current Albanian family structures and customs having survived the communist years of “state feminism” (King & Vullnetari 2009, 23). The predominantly male-led context of Albanian migration history has been thoroughly explored (Hatziprokopiou 2006; Vullnetari 2007), along with the roots of patriarchy in everyday life in Albania. In addition to having the major and at times sole responsibility and care for both children and elderly, alongside household chores and farming or other kind of livelihood duties, women in Albania had to endure a positionality of subordination under a protectively controlled patriarchal family context.

Although women are the only income providers for most of our participants’ households, male youth still regard the father of the house the leading figure of the family. Although our participant, Kyriakos, realizes that under the current conditions of the economic crisis women often offer the sole family income, he suggests that this is “*better than nothing*” and he further explains that: *‘Even so the man is still the mainstay. The children see a central figure in the family [the father]. The mother is still responsible within the house’*.

As King *et al.* explain, “Despite the transformative effect of migration and remittances on the Albanian economy and on people’s regimes of mobility, these changes took place against a much more enduring cultural background of patriarchy and entrenched gender roles” (2011, 401). It is obvious through our participants’ narrative accounts that immigrant youth’s home culture and norms often still persist in the host country and shape present attitudes and choices.

I would like Albanian women to change their mentality, way of thinking, perceptions and aspirations but I wouldn’t like them to change their principles and values. (Nino 23 years old)

My perceptions are more or less the same with my mother’s especially regarding values and principles. She raised me so we have the same values. (Jiasmin 19 years old) From an anthropological perspective, Sherry Ortner (1996) has expertly discussed the impact that social subjects as individual actors have on a particular society by acting on their interpretations through cultural specific frames of reference. She emphasizes that individual agency on the one hand influences collective structures and shapes them according to actual needs while on the other hand, it triggers developments which the individual can neither predict, nor control (Ortner 1996, 17-18). However, Ortner argues that the influence of culture upon individual agency is by no means absolute, but that ‘culture’ and ‘structure’ must be reconsidered not as “totalized hypercoherent objects”, but as “always partial hegemonies”, which leave sites “of alternative practices and perspectives” that “may become the bases for resistance and transformation” (Ortner 1996, 18).

Our participants draw from their comparative experiential and transnational mobile lives (in some cases translocal as well having relocated within Greece and between urban and rural

settings) and they demonstrate their ability to decipher cultural codes that they then selectively incorporate or reject.

I am Greek-Albanian. I identify though more with Greece because I grew up and live here. This country has offered me education, good or bad no matter, it has offered me everything. Albania has only offered me the Albanian identity, nothing more. I feel comfortable in both countries. There [Albania] they call me 'Greco'. (Geraldo 20 years old)

I identify with Albania. I definitely love Greece, and I could say that I belong a little more to Greece; it is the country that educated me and gave me the opportunities to go ahead. I was born here and grew up here in Greece, I have my friends here, I fell in love here; there are so many things that 'tie' me with this place. (Victor 22 years old)

For the time being I belong to Greece, but I have not forgotten my roots, my parents and generally all my relatives back home. I am a Greek citizen that has the right to speak, vote and express my opinion. The rest of myself is my [Albanian] descent...I don't forget... (Daniel 24 years old)

Thus, while not thoroughly rejecting their ancestral roots, they assume new *routes* of transformative gendered potential as independent youth who can form relations with those they wish, they can pursue educational and professional aspirations and they can choose where they wish to ultimately reside and craft new lives. Whereas Albanian patriarchal cultural norms back in Albania as well as in Greece are challenged, so are rigid perceptions of becoming 'Hellenised' in order to fit into Greek society. Our participants are aware of their ancestral roots and celebrate those. They equally cherish the fact that they are able to develop their talents and interests in

Greece at the present time but do not seem to exclude the possibility of relocating to another ('westernised/developed') country overseas.

Interestingly, almost none of them consider the possibility of going to live in Albania. The reasons mentioned vary from clearly personal (*"I'm used to a different way of life"; "I don't feel there is a future for me in Albania"; "I don't like the moral code there"; "My future is always here.... to find a job and make my life here... my thinking is here in Greece;" "Women are inferior and I don't want to live in a country that women are not respected"; "I'm happy living in Greece, there is no reason for me to live in a country [Albania] I don't know at all"*) to more economically driven ones (*'Albania is underdeveloped, here we are in Europe'; 'Going back to Albania, would be going backward generally in life; I want to look ahead, not behind'; 'My parents would see me going to another country but to Albania...never!'*)

Overall, participants dwell on the transformative potential of resistance and agency that their migrant lives have offered them. It is within such a context of resistance and transformation that we view our participants, both women and men transnational youth, as agents of constructive change for both Greece and Albania. Our participants' extensive social and personal relations with the wider Greek society are a hopeful demonstration of peer acceptance that can dynamically limit structures of exclusion.

### **Conclusion: Reflecting on Youth Transnational Identities of Belonging and Inclusion**

In concluding our discussion of Albanian youth transnational identities, we have two preliminary observations to make in relation to the core question and subthemes we set out to respond to in this paper. For one, our participants have neither exhibited that their identities are solidly post-ethnic, nor as immigrants have they expressed a post-national sense of self. And, as a second



core observation, our participants' immigrant youth identities are shaped by the gendered spatialities that impact them in their everyday lives and the emotional temporalities of those encounters in both public and private spaces. That is, their specific emotional reactions to this particular time of economic crisis is manifested in both their family discussions and everyday life activities, which in turn shape their identities.

It is important to note here the interplay of agency and ancestry in shaping youth aspirations and transnational identities in crisis-ridden Greece. That is, while Albanian youth distinguish their lived experience in Greece from what these would have been in Albania, in terms of cultural identity, economic/professional prospects and gender relations, at the same time their decision-making is impacted by the expectations that their parents have instilled and this has further shaped their own desire to move forward, which, also includes moving yet to another country.

Furthermore, one of the core issues in relation to migrant youth identification was to explore the nexus between participants' sense of cultural self and belonging or non-belonging to a migrant community. It is important to acknowledge that migrant youth cultural identities may be articulated within multiple axes of power, inequality and exclusion. Hence in referring back to our theoretical discussion on empowerment and gendered agency, we have encountered a mosaic of responses, yet, it is very clear that participants do have a sense of agency that is gendered as female youth often resist cultural norms of patriarchy while male youth often seem to contradict themselves between words and actions, that is, what they say and what they actually do. Nevertheless both seek to be empowered by living independent lives in Greece, fully accepted by both the local Greek society and the wider Albanian community in Greece and in their ancestral homeland.

This paper aimed at addressing questions of migrant youth cultural identity by employing narrative material exploring the lived transnational experiences of second-generation Albanian immigrants. The analysis in this paper examines the ways in which the migrant gender discourse is negotiated and/or challenged by the research participants in their everyday lives. The paper focused on the narrations of the primary themes of power, culture and change. The narrative material also revealed the tensions and constraints on participants arising from group norms within the community concerning ethno-cultural practice and surveillance, the question of endogamy and gendered sexualities. On the level of the individual, cultural traditions employed as an identity resource can have diverse facets in everyday life. Some participants may be empowered by retaining cultural traditions; other participants may abandon them when they are no longer strategies of survival.

Thus, it is salient to consider the individual ways young immigrants practice their identities in everyday life. Although second generation's incorporation is important for migrant group belonging, participants may develop a different relation to their home nation depending on their socio-economic background. Most importantly, Albanian youth seem to experience two sets of gender relations: those of their own classed and gendered immigrant origin and those of the majority ethnic group represented in the host state.

Finally, we wish to contemplate on ways to extend this research. One of those directions is through a comparative policy-oriented analysis of youth identities in European urban and rural spaces. Beyond the vast and well-know differences that characterise European societies, a problematic commonality remains evidently unresolved: social sustainability of democratic societies requires political solutions that take on board ethno-cultural diversity. However, further research is required to illuminate the complexities involved in such social projects and to suggest

policy-relevant solutions. Such research acknowledges the possibility of multidimensional identities and multiple affiliations of the self that deconstruct strict and exclusive ethno-national identities but also are aware of celebratory/short-sighted discussions of ‘multiculturalisms’ and ‘cosmopolitanisms’ while ignoring institutional racisms often inherent in such theorisations.

In reflection, we see our paper as a modest contribution to understanding migrant youth identities but we hope that it will stimulate further research and discussion on the contribution that youth (migrant) trajectories can have in fostering sustainable livelihoods of peace, prosperity and growth. Youth mobilities can offer important opportunities in facilitating fruitful livelihoods of development. Governments, policy-makers, educational institutions and practitioners can aid to the promotion of active/democratic citizenship and participation in civil society through fostering tolerance, acceptance, solidarity, inclusion, and understanding in diversity, cross-cultural interaction and intra-generational communication. In that sense, migrant pathways of uncertainty and despair can become journeys of learning, hope and belonging that can mould identities of inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat News Release Euroindicators 52/2014, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-01042014-AP/EN/3-01042014-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-01042014-AP/EN/3-01042014-AP-EN.PDF) (accessed November 15, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>Youth Unemployment, Eurostat News Release Euroindicators 52/2014, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-01042014-AP/EN/3-01042014-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-01042014-AP/EN/3-01042014-AP-EN.PDF) (accessed November 15, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>The World Bank (2014). Indicators, GDP per capita, (current US\$), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> (accessed November 16, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> In March 2010 the Greek Parliament adopted Law No. 3838/2010 on citizenship and naturalisation, introducing for the first time a substantial element of *jus soli* into the concept of Greek citizenship. In December 2012 this law was overruled as anti-constitutional by the Greek Supreme Administrative Court, on the basis that it conflicts with the constitutionally circumscribed *jus sanguinis* principle.